



When Johnny Jones, living in a middle-class suburb in central California, made a commitment to pray five blessings on five neighbors for five minutes a day for five days a week for five weeks, surprising things began to happen. One neighbor asked him how she could have a personal relationship with Christ. When Johnny shared the gospel with her, she accepted Christ as her Savior. A drug-dealing neighbor asked Johnny to pray for him and help him turn his life around and get out of the drug business. A Buddhist couple from across the street asked if they could go to church with Johnny's family. And a Hispanic couple living next door asked him to

Your Prayers

start a Bible study for the neighborhood. Johnny Jones' prayers mattered to God. They provided God the opportunity He was looking for to work in the hearts and lives of Johnny's neighbors.



**Things
happen—
or don't
happen—
because
of prayer.**

After

by Alvin J. Vander Griend

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEVIN BURKE

God gave us

intercessory prayer so we could partner with Him in transforming society, saving the lost, and establishing His kingdom.

Pastor Alex received an unexpected call from the owner of a corner store near his church in Brooklyn, New York. The owner complained that her store was repeatedly being robbed. Drug dealers were dealing and prostitutes soliciting on her corner. She said, "I am calling you, Pastor, to ask you what you are going to do about it."

Pastor Alex agreed to send in a team to pray that God would intervene. Within three weeks, the surprised owner reported that the drug dealers had been arrested, the prostitutes were gone, and her store hadn't been robbed. In addition, two customers at the store had connected with the prayer group and given their lives to Christ. Some weeks later, the store owner also came to Christ.

The prayers of this team were important to God. He worked in response to them and began to change the lives of people who mattered to Him.

God gave us intercessory prayer so we could partner with Him in transforming society, saving the lost, and establishing His kingdom. To be sure, God is perfectly capable of doing these things without us. He is all-wise, full of love, and almighty. In His wisdom He always knows what is best. In His love He always chooses what is best. And in His power He is able to do what is best. He doesn't need us. Nevertheless, in His sovereign good pleasure, He has chosen to involve us, through our prayers, in accomplishing His will. Our intercessory prayers are important to God; they should also be important to us.

The Bible gives us at least six clear reasons why our prayers matter to God.

God governs in response to our prayers.

When I first heard the phrase "God rules the world through the prayers of His people," I was skeptical. My view of God was of one who knew what to do, decided what to do, and then did it. I still believe He knows what to do and decides what He wants to do; but I have come to realize that He ordinarily doesn't just go ahead and do it. Instead, He prompts His people to pray and then acts in response to their prayers.

God had to teach me this in a very personal way. Several years ago I was making a determined effort to become a better intercessor. I tried to give it more time, cover more needs, and pray with greater intensity. Soon, however, I found myself skipping these extended prayer times when it wasn't convenient. But it bothered me that I could skip prayer so easily.

When I asked the Lord for insight on this, He helped me see that I didn't really believe intercession changed anything. I felt my prayers didn't make a difference since those I prayed for seemed to get along just as well whether I prayed or not.

Then God began to teach me important lessons from Scripture. From Gen. 18:16-33, He showed me He was willing to rest the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah on Abraham's prayers. From Ex. 17:8-13, He showed me that the prayers of Moses were determinative for the battle Israel was waging against the Amalekites. From Ezk. 22:23-31, He showed me He was willing to show mercy to His people and not destroy them if there was an intercessor to plead on their behalf. Finding none, He went ahead and poured out His wrath on them. From Neh. 1:4-11, He showed me that the plan to rebuild Jerusalem's walls came in response to the fasting and prayers of Nehemiah. In each of these situations, God's governance was based on the intercessory prayers of His people. Things happened or didn't happen because of prayer.

This is God's normal way of working. Things will happen as we pray that wouldn't have happened if we had not prayed. And things will not happen if we do not pray that would have happened if we had prayed. This does not mean God can be manipulated through prayer to do what we want if what we want is contrary to His will. Instead, God reveals His will to us by His Word and works in us by His Spirit so that we know His will and pray in accord with it. Then, in responding to our prayers, He accomplishes both His will and ours, and, in the process, involves us.

God releases His grace and power when we pray.

My dictionary defines intercession as "acting between two parties; begging or pleading on behalf of another." An intercessor is a go-between, representing one party

th Him in transforming his kingdom.

to another. In intercession, believers go before God and beseech Him on behalf of others to release into their lives what they themselves—the intercessors—cannot supply.

Jesus' story of the friend who came at midnight (Lk. 11:5-8) illustrates and confirms the role of the intercessor. The host in this story has a friend in need who comes at midnight. He also has a friend with bread. Unable to meet the need of his midnight guest, this host goes to his other friend—the one with bread—and pleads boldly and shamelessly till he receives what is needed. His pleading releases bread to sustain the life of his needy friend. He is a go-between, an intercessor.

James reminds us, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:16). This doesn't mean prayer is powerful in and of itself. When one person prays for another, no force, energy, or vibes flow from the one to the other. All the power in prayer is God's power released and activated by prayer. Our prayers reach the ears of God, who then moves in response to our prayers.

Olan Hallesby, in his book *Prayer*, provides a mental picture of how this works: "This power is so rich and so mobile that all we have to do when we pray is to point to the persons or things to which we desire to have this power applied, and He, the Lord of this power, will direct the necessary power to the desired place."

R. A. Torrey, enthralled by the enormity of this power, exclaimed in *The Power of Prayer*, "Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. All that God is, and . . . has, is at the disposal of prayer. Prayer can do anything that God can do."

People desperately need what only God can give. Many families are dysfunctional. Many churches are stagnant or declining. The majority of people around us do not have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. And they need far more than we are able to give them. They need God's power and grace. And God chooses to give it in response to our asking. That's the role of intercessors.



**Intercession is the key to
great works.**

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus said to His disciples, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" (Jn. 14:12-13). In going to the Father, Jesus would be given all power in heaven and on earth. Thus empowered, He would continue His work on earth in a different way—through His disciples.

Their asking in His name would link Him to them. By means of prayer, His power would be at their disposal as they carried on His ministry "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Prayer would be "the talking part" of this ministry partnership in which Christ would supply the power and His disciples would do the work.

But notice that Jesus was addressing

these surprising words not just to the disciples but to "anyone who has faith in me." That includes you, if you are a Christian, and me.

What a powerful combination! Christ on the throne of the universe, empowering us here on earth to build His kingdom. We ask, He acts, and the work gets done—great works to the glory of the Father.

What Is a House of Prayer?

God is currently doing wonderful things through small clusters of Christians who are interceding for their neighbors in Houses of Prayer. A House of Prayer is two or more believers who gather to release God's power upon their neighbors through prayer and to convey His blessing through deeds of love and kindness. A House of Prayer may be a nuclear family praying in its home. It may be Christian neighbors who don't actually meet together but network their prayer efforts. Or it may be neighborhood believers who meet regularly for prayer.

The House of Prayer strategy comes out of Paul's charge in 1 Tim. 2:1-4: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone." *Everyone* includes neighbors, especially nonChristians, because "God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Houses of Prayer are attractive today because the method is so simple. If you have neighbors, if you detest Satan's influence, and if you can devote 15 minutes or more a week to intercession, you are a House of Prayer candidate.

Houses of Prayer can be started anywhere. Active Houses of Prayer have organized in the workplace, in prisons, in retirement homes, and on college campuses. But Houses of Prayer tethered to a local church tend to influence their communities longer. The local church provides a framework and resources that encourage, support, and connect House of Prayer members and leaders in their common cause.

It may seem odd to pray for neighbors you don't know. When I first began to pray for my neighbors, I didn't know them. But as I began to pray for them, my awareness increased and eventually I felt a burden for them. I wanted to get to know them. What followed was a kind of friendship evangelism.

Unbelievers today are inclined to believe in spiritual powers even if they aren't able to connect with them personally. When House of Prayer members offer to take their nonChristian neighbors' concerns before God, many are not only open to this but grateful for it. House of Prayer groups reach out to neighbors who are hungry to be cared for. Like the hurting and sinful who gathered around Jesus (Lk. 15:1), today's neighbors are drawn to people who are motivated by love.

It is no accident that you live where you do. God, who determined the times set for the nations and "the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26), has determined the times and neighborhoods where you and I live. He has put us right where He wants us to minister. And there is no more important or effective way to love our neighbors than to plead their cause at the throne of our heavenly Father.

For more information on Houses of Prayer, write:

Houses of Prayer Everywhere
P.O. Box 141312
Grand Rapids, MI 49514
(800) 217-5200

—Alvin J. Vander Griend

Reprinted from the September/October 1997 issue of Pray! magazine. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Prayer transforms society.

Paul, writing to Timothy, urges "that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:1-2). A peaceful, quiet, transformed society is God's ideal. "Requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving" offered up by God's people are the God-ordained means by which transformation is brought about.

We are beginning to see the reality of this in some places today. In Bakersfield, California, a church spearheaded a prayer ministry that targeted apartment complexes in a high-need area. Crime was so high in these complexes that the police were often called in two or three times a day. Drugs were sold freely. Unemployment was high. Most of the families were dysfunctional in some form or another.

All this began to change when the church took a prayer-care approach to the situation. They prayerwalked the area, planted Houses of Prayer, and reached out to needy residents with compassion ministries. The eight Houses of Prayer met weekly in the complexes to pray for the residents and their needs. The church reported the following results:

- A person from the complex got a job the day after he was released from prison.
- The manager of one of the complexes, initially resistant to having Houses of Prayer in the complex, was converted.
- An out-of-control boy, who was kicked out of school for unruliness, turned into a hardworking, straight-A student.
- Drug dealers moved out.
- Many people started going to church.
- Ten people made commitments to Christ.
- Eighteen young people from the complexes got involved in the church's youth ministries.
- Several new Bible studies started.
- Residents of the complexes began to look out for each other.

The crime rate dropped so dramatically—from two or three calls to the police a day to one or two calls a week—that the police asked the church to plant Houses of Prayer in other complexes with similar problems. Prayer is making the difference.

I think this is the kind of transformation God had in mind when He spoke of prayer as the means to make it possible for believers to “live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

People are saved through prayer.

The Bible clearly requires us to pray for people who are not saved. Jesus modeled prayer for the unsaved when He prayed, “My prayer is not for [my disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message” (Jn. 17:20). And the Apostle Paul modeled this pattern of praying for the unsaved when he said, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved (Ro. 10:1). In 1 Tim. 2:4, the Holy Spirit reminds us that God “wants all men to be saved and

to come to a knowledge of the truth.” God’s plan to make that happen is found in the first verses of the same paragraph: “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (v. 1). And when people are saved as a result of prayer, the Spirit declares, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior” (v. 3).

God honors prayer for the unsaved. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, a House of Prayer saw four families come to the Lord after eight months of weekly meetings to pray for neighbors. In Mira Loma, California, three children, a couple, and an elderly person who had worshiped Satan came to salvation when two couples prayed for their neighbors for six months. This is prayer evangelism—God moving in the hearts and lives of people in response to the earnest prayers of believers.

Prayer defeats Satan.

Two powerful forces work in the world today—the power of God and the power

of Satan. The power of God is infinitely greater, but we are affected by both.

Since Satan’s power is greater than that of humans, we are constantly at risk. Paul reminds us that we struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12). In order to stand, we are challenged to put on the whole armor of God and to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (v. 18).


In response to prayer, God brings His power to our defense so we are able to stand against the devil’s schemes. When the Israelites, on their way to the Promised Land, were confronted by the devil-inspired Amalekites, Moses’ intercession moved the hands of God to intervene and give the battle to Joshua’s army (Ex. 17:8-13). Today, Jesus Christ sits on the throne of glory and lifts holy hands in behalf of embattled believers. And we, His saints, stand and pray with Him ►

A Powerful Message of Hope from LUIS PALAU

How could a loving, all-powerful God allow a baby to be born severely deformed...a young girl to be raped...a husband and father to walk out on his family...? In this brand-new book, evangelist Luis Palau helps those in pain come to grips with their need for God. He honestly recounts agonizing experiences from his own life and from the lives of others—and shows the path from suffering to newfound faith in Jesus Christ. This book offers good news to those in need of solace.

“No one answers the questions people have about God better than Luis Palau.”

—Cal Thomas, syndicated columnist

 Doubleday

Available wherever books are sold • Visit the author’s Web site at www.lpea.org

Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?

Finding Solace in
Times of Trouble



LUIS PALAU

AUTHOR OF *God Is Relevant*

TO UNDERSTAND
COVENANT
IS TO KNOW
YOU ARE
GOD'S BELOVED,
FOREVER.



"Everything God does," writes well-known author and Bible teacher Kay Arthur, "is based on His covenant."

And when you understand how thoroughly the dynamic concept of covenant permeates everything God says in His Word, and everything He does in our lives, you'll come to experience one of the most stabilizing, most freeing truths you'll ever know.

Through her characteristically warm and wise exploration of the Scripture, Kay Arthur will lead you into discovering the stunning truth of God's covenant — and help you experience its revolutionary truth in your life.



WATERBROOK
PRESS
Spiritual Refreshment

Our Covenant God by Kay Arthur.
Available now in bookstores everywhere.

even as Aaron and Hur stood by Moses to support him.

When Peter was being severely tested by Satan, Jesus came to his defense with prayer and then explained to Peter what and why He had prayed: "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Lk. 22:32).

The devil dreads our prayers more than anything. A mighty prayer warrior once said, "Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." It's no wonder Satan trembles. By means of prayer, the power of the omnipotent God of heaven and earth is brought against him. He doesn't stand a chance.

Transforming Prayer

Prayer can move mountains. It can change human hearts, families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations. It's the ultimate source of power because it is, in reality, the power of Almighty God.

Prayer can do what political action cannot, what education cannot, what military might cannot, and what planning committees cannot. All these are impotent by comparison.

By prayer the kingdom of God is built, and by prayer the kingdom of Satan is destroyed. Where there is no prayer, there are no great works, and there is no building of the kingdom. Where there is much prayer and fervent prayer, there are great gains for the kingdom: God's rule is established, His power is directed, His will is done, society is transformed, lost persons are saved, and saints are enabled to "stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:11). If that isn't enough to compel us to "devote [ourselves] to prayer" and "always [wrestle] in prayer" (Col. 4:2,12), I don't know what is! ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ALVIN J. VANDER GRIEND is director of Houses of Prayer Everywhere (HOPE) and a member of the National Prayer Committee and the Denominational Prayer Leaders Network. Someday Al would like to teach courses on prayer at

seminaries around the world.